

City Beat

There are eight million stories in my albums. This is one of them...

Henrici's was indisputably a Chicago institution that billed itself as "Chicago's Most Famous Restaurant" and for a time, it might well have been. It was started as a small coffee and pastry shop in 1868 near Madison and Wells by Austrian immigrant Philip Henrici who came from a noted Vienna family of restaurateurs. That shop burned down in the Great Fire, but he rebuilt in a few different places before settling in the heart of Chicago's theater district on Randolph Street between Dearborn and Clark streets.

The restaurant became a favorite of touring performers like Al Jolson, Henny Youngman and Danny Thomas, and local politicians, including Mayor Richard J. Daley, who had power breakfasts there almost every morning. It was torn down to build the Civic Center later named for Daley.

Henrici's was a white-tablecloth establishment serving mid-priced American fare like prime rib and lobster and freshly baked pastries for dessert, including the coffee cake in the recipe below. One of their signatures was coffee served with a pitcher of whipped cream on the side. They also advertised Henrici's as having "no orchestral din," meaning no live music.

Henrici's eventually expanded to 20 locations in the Midwest. The location near O'Hare Airport was at the O'Hare Inn motel at Mannheim and Higgins and known as Henrici's Golden Barrel. It opened the same year the Kennedy Expressway was extended to O'Hare. Unlike Henrici's on Randolph with its "no orchestral din," the Golden Barrel featured dancing girls and live bands.

After Henrici's on Randolph was torn down in 1962, some original relics from Vienna were moved to the O'Hare location like coffee urns, chandeliers and a grandfather clock. The Pillsbury Corporation acquired the seven remaining Henrici's locations in 1979. The Henrici's at the O'Hare Inn, which by then was a Ramada Inn, closed in the mid-1980s.

